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first Person

Exploring the many facets of Gettysburg's history and heritage | BY FIRST LADY SUSAN CORBETT

Gettysburg is one of the most intriguing, multilayered, multifaceted places in our country. There are multiple ways you can approach the understanding of the Battle of Gettysburg and its lasting significance.

One of the first things I noticed about Gettysburg is its great beauty. We are fortunate to have so much of the battlefield preserved and rehabilitated. There's nothing quite like standing on the top of Little Round Top and looking across the Gettysburg landscape. When you're walking through the battlefield, you feel the importance of what happened here. The Governor and I believe that there are a handful of places in the world that are sacred, and the Gettysburg battlefield is one of those places.

But the Gettysburg experience is also the study of war. It's a study of leadership. There aren't many sites where you can stand in the place where incredible leadership decisions were made and the consequences of those decisions were immediate and dramatic. It's also the study of disaster relief and how a town dealt with a tragedy of mammoth proportions.

However, the approach that appealed most to me was the study of arts and humanities. One of the first things I noticed about the battlefield was the beauty of its sculpture—how the story of the battle is revealed through art.

I worked with Sue Boardman [Gettysburg Foundation leadership program director] to develop an Art in the

Park tour, which is still one of my favorite ways to explore the battlefield.

Then there's the storytelling aspect. One hundred sixty-five thousand men fought there, and every one of them had a life and a family. Hearing the individual stories was just such a privilege. One of the most moving artifacts I saw while working at the museum was a soldier's journal that had newspaper clippings, photos and a dried flower within it. They are little pieces of someone's life.

I also think about the precision of the Gettysburg Address. It's so concise, insightful and eloquent—with exactly the right word choice for impact.

I'm delighted that the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg has been such a success, especially for the community. I'm most happy that many people visited Gettysburg for the first time as a result of the promotion surrounding this important commemoration. I know many of those first-time visitors will return. There are so many opportunities for volunteerism at Gettysburg. It is a place people can help preserve and rehabilitate. Whether it's rolling up your sleeves and building a fence on the battlefield, serving on a committee, or making a contribution, I hope people will come here and take advantage of these opportunities because Gettysburg's history belongs to all Americans.

I am frequently asked questions about my career, being First Lady, and the amazing opportunities that I have had. But I believe that, for me, looking back, being



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involved in the creation of a new museum in Gettysburg will be the thing of which I am most proud. It has changed, and will continue to change, what generations of people understand about our history and how Gettysburg defined us as a nation. 

Susan Corbett became the 44th First Lady of Pennsylvania when her husband Tom Corbett was sworn in as Governor of Pennsylvania on January 18, 2011. As First Lady, she is passionate about promoting the commonwealth's unique historical and cultural attractions as Pennsylvania's First Tourist. In this role, she visits and recommends must-see museums, important historic locations and one-of-a-kind attractions found only in Pennsylvania. The First Lady has also begun the Opening Doors initiative, which aims to increase the number of students who graduate from high school on time by focusing on middle school students.